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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 423rd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 21 June 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

GRANTING OF OBSERVER STATUS TO NEPAL

1. The CHAIRMAN said that a letter had been received from the Chargé d'affaires of Nepal, requesting that that country be permitted to participate as an Observer in the Committee's deliberations. He took it that the Committee wished to accede to the request.

2. It was so decided.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 47/59 (continued)

3. Mr. JUSUF (Indonesia) noted that the convening of a United Nations conference on the Indian Ocean had been postponed repeatedly, ostensibly due to the lack of participation by some permanent members of the Security Council and major maritime users of the Indian Ocean in the preparations for the conference.

4. It was the conviction of his delegation that cooperation among littoral and hinterland States, as well as external Powers, in establishing a zone of peace and security in the Indian Ocean would promote confidence-building, which, in turn, would enhance peace and security in the area. Member States of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) were continuing their efforts to establish a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in South-East Asia, the attainment of which objectives was of paramount importance and mutually complementary to the establishment of a zone of peace and security in the Indian Ocean. In the improved political and security environment, fulfilment of the objectives contained in the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace would be of great benefit to the regional and external Powers, and could facilitate the peaceful settlement of a complex set of issues, leading ultimately to new areas of understanding and a new era of relationships.

5. While remaining firmly committed to the convening of a United Nations conference on the Indian Ocean as an essential instrument in implementing the Declaration, Indonesia had an open mind with regard to alternative approaches. It believed, however, that all States should participate in the work of the Committee, and appealed to those States which had not previously been able to do so to join in the Committee's deliberations forthwith. With regard to charting the Committee's future course of action, it was generally agreed that the external Powers should respect the views expressed and the positions taken by the littoral and hinterland States.

6. Mr. PALIHAKKARA (Sri Lanka) said that recent changes in the international political environment provided the possibility for new and positive developments in international cooperation. He was confident that progress could be made towards the achievement of peace, security and stability in the area, and suggested that a brainstorming session might prove useful. Manifestations of great Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean area had greatly diminished, if not ceased altogether, and despite a residual presence of extraregional strategic interests, States of the region were seeking to form new partnerships based on cooperation rather than confrontation. The concept of security, which during the cold war era had been predominantly military, had begun to be interpreted in a new and broader manner, emphasizing regional cooperation in such fields as

(Mr. Palihakkara, Sri Lanka)

socio-economic development, culture, environment and interpersonal contact. The South Asian Association for Regional Co operation (SAARC) had made considerable strides towards advancing the spirit of regionalism and achieving functional cooperation, and was committed to developing cooperative linkages with other regional groups in Asia and elsewhere.

7. There were various approaches that the Committee might take, the first being the conference approach. Thus far that approach had not produced any results. Another possibility would be to allow events to take their course, in other words, to do little or nothing. That approach undoubtedly ran counter to the current trends of promoting collective peace-building efforts. A third possibility might be an incremental one, in which countries of the Indian Ocean area, with the cooperation of other interested States, could identify new methods of promoting peace and work gradually towards that goal. While not precluding the conference, an incremental approach would allow Indian Ocean States to build on the areas of cooperation that already existed. His delegation proposed that the Committee set up a forum of Indian Ocean States to review the changing international situation and to discuss feasible first steps towards achieving a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean area. Such a forum would necessarily require the commitment, encouragement and participation of major Powers and major maritime users, which naturally had a profound interest in ensuring that the Indian Ocean area remained one of cooperation and accessibility.

8. Mr. HONG (Singapore) pointed out that the South-East Asian region had not only the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality but also the Treaty of amity and cooperation in South-East Asia, which had been endorsed by the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly as a regional confidence-building measure. That treaty provided for various mechanisms, including mediation and fact-finding, for the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Committee might find it profitable to explore the possibility of drawing up a similar friendship and cooperation treaty for the Indian Ocean area, as an interim step towards the creation of the zone of peace.

9. It had become increasingly clear over the preceding three years that the old approach was not working; if the Committee failed to seek innovative and imaginative solutions to the current impasse, its days might be numbered.

10. Mr. NEUHAUS (Australia) said that his delegation welcomed resolution 47/59 and the opportunity it offered for an exploration of alternative approaches to the question of peace in the Indian Ocean. He was confident that, as the Committee forged ahead, the interest of those Western countries that had withdrawn from active participation would be rekindled. He agreed that some of the 20 points mentioned by the representative of India could be profitably utilized by the Committee. The regional disarmament paper presented to the Disarmament Commission that year also contained useful approaches to regional confidence-building. Australia had supported the creation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, which would naturally have an impact on peace and security in the Indian Ocean area. In addition to the developments in the South-East Asian subregion of the Indian Ocean described by the representative of Singapore, there were non-military confidence-building measures including various regional environmental endeavours. Finally, his delegation agreed that a brainstorming session could prove fruitful.

11. Mr. SHARMA (Observer for Nepal), after thanking members of the Committee for acceding to his country's request that it be permitted to participate in deliberations as an observer, said that the ideological confrontation of the cold war was being replaced by cooperative efforts to maintain international peace and security, and that while the context had changed radically, the goal of establishing a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean region remained as valid as it had been in 1971 and had assumed even greater urgency. A disturbing feature of the post-cold-war era had been the replacement of the East-West conflict by scores of smaller ones, which had blurred the thin divide between national and international problems. The Indian Ocean adjoined an extremely sensitive area, and implementation of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace would have a crucial impact on the peace and security not only of the region but of the world as a whole.

12. There was now a clear consensus that the establishment of zones of peace under appropriate conditions determined freely by States concerned in the zone, taking into account the characteristics of the zone and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations would be an important step towards regional confidence-building measures, thereby facilitating regional arms control and disarmament measures. The establishment of zones of peace could make a great contribution towards strengthening the security of States within those zones, as well as international peace and security, and it was impossible to overemphasize its importance for the economic and social development of the States within a zone and for cooperation between them.

13. The effectiveness of zones of peace depended to a very great degree on the commitment of States outside the region to respect the status of such zones; he shared the view expressed by the representative of India that there could be no meaningful discussion of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean without the active participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and other major maritime users. Moreover, consensus must be reached on the geographical definition of the region.

14. Mr. MAHMOOD (Pakistan) said that General Assembly resolution 47/59 had directed the Committee to consider new alternative approaches leading to the achievement of the goals contained in the Declaration, taking into account the recent changes in the international political landscape which had provided new opportunities to strengthen international and regional peace, security and stability. It was necessary now to examine how that goal could be achieved.

15. One constructive step would be to convene a meeting of the States of the region, which would provide an opportunity to review the situation in the post-cold-war era and contribute towards measures to preserve and promote regional peace and stability. Such a meeting would complement the efforts being made within the framework of the Committee, as well as global efforts to further international peace and security.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.